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After Marriage

By CLAUDINE SISSON

Mrs. Clarence Vhay, a bride of six weeks, was lately strolling along the banks of the river just outside the village of Ferndale. She had come down from the old farmhouse on the hill where the peach and apple and cherry trees were in blossom, and where Uncle Zeb and Aunt Mary had welcomed the bridal couple two weeks before.

A bridal tour of a few days and then Clarence had returned to his place in the bank. Ferndale was handy to the city, and they were to pass the summer on the old farm.

"Susie, remember what Clarence told you about the boat," cautioned the aunt as the bride set forth from the house.

The words started a train of thought that was both pleasant and unpleasant. Sitting on the bank of the river the young wife gave herself up to it. She had married Clarence Vhay for love. Not once during their two years of courtship had they quarreled. She could say they hadn't even differed. He was as kind and considerate as could be asked for. He paid homage to a queen. He deferred to her in every way. She could not mention one short-coming as she sat there leaning against the old willow.

And there was the paradox—she was not satisfied that she couldn't. She was wishing that she could. She knew that she had a temper. She was self-willed and obstinate. She loved argument—when she knew that she had the best of it. And Clarence had insisted that she hadn't a fault—not one. She had said do this and do that and he had obeyed. All womankind like courtesy and gallantry, but few like blind devotion. When the news of the marriage came down to the farmhouse Aunt Mary had said to Uncle Zeb:

"Well, I do hope Susie has married the right man. If she has she'll make a fine woman. He's got to be a man who can boss her. That's what she and a heap of other brides need—a boss. Give 'em their own way and they'll go through the world flippety-flop and never amount to shucks."

And three or four days after the bridal couple had come down she had more to say to Uncle Zeb. She said:

"Pa, I guess Susie's got the right man."

"Oh, he loves her, I guess," was the answer.

"And he'll boss her, too."

"He ain't doin' it very much now."

"But you jest wait. He's one of the quiet kind. He's got to be aroused before the fur flies. He's lettin' her lead him around like a calf now, but the day will come when he'll break the rope."

"And then what's going to happen?"

"Susie will either eat humble pie or run away. It'll be accordin' to how he does. If he just flares up she'll run; if he picks her up and shakes her till her teeth chatter she'll turn out a good wife."

And down by the old willow tree the bride continued to muse. There was something lacking in the character of Clarence. She couldn't just name it, but she realized it. She went all over the matter, but failed to grasp it. She had married as happily as the average girl, but—

What was it? Wasn't she perfectly happy? Yes-o-o. No-o-o. Then her eyes rested on the old skiff tied to the bank and an inspiration came. That very morning before leaving for town Clarence had said:

"Darling, your husband wants you to promise him something. If you go down to the river today don't try to paddle around in the old skiff. You may be carried down stream and over the dam, and drowned, and then what would become of me?"

And as she started out on her walk Aunt Mary had called a reminder. Clarence had scented danger. He had the common sense to see that a leaky old boat with a piece of board for a paddle was no plaything for her. Yes, but why hadn't he said so in plain, straight language? Why not have said:

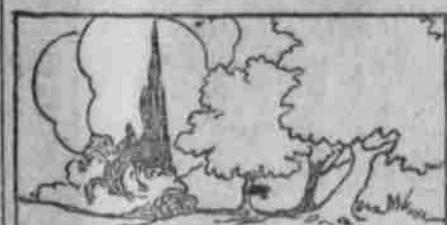
"Susie, if you go down to the river keep out of that old boat. Mind, now—no fooling around."

She was vexed at the thought that he hadn't said so, and yet she might have been vexed at him if he had. However, she would show him and Aunt Mary that she was no baby. There was a foot of water in the old boat. She bailed it out with the rusty old dipper. She got one foot wet and splattered her white dress, but she was pleased over it. She was having her way. She got into a hammock, and she knew she could get into a skiff. Yes, she accomplished it, after falling flat on the bottom.

The bride had seen a girl standing up and paddling a canoe on Lake George. She therefore stood up to paddle a skiff on Plumtree river. There was a difference. The difference was that the bride came so near upsetting the boat that it dipped a barrel of water and she fell into it with a great splash and lost her paddle in so doing. There wasn't a single plumtree on the banks of Plumtree river. They were all alders and blackberry bushes and wild grape vines. It was a modest river and shrank from observation behind these things.

The bride was bound for the dam and the grave beyond. There could be no doubt of that.

This bride came to realize this fact, and she sat still while the boat rolled along on the current. When



She Bailed It Out With the Rusty Old Dipper.

she came in sight of the sawmill at the dam old Uncle Eph Johnson, the owner, would be there, but he was so near sighted that he could not tell a young married woman from an oak sawlog. And if he did make her out he had only one leg to swim with and couldn't reach her in time. It was no use to hope. The thing to do was to compose her features and die with a smile on her face, as if she really liked drowning.

But at last a man appeared. He divested himself of coat, hat, vest and shoes. He cried out something. He gesticulated.

It proved to be Clarence! The bank had shut up an hour earlier than usual to let him get home to his bride. Had he come too late?

The bride closed her eyes and floated on. She was not cross. She was simply resigned. She heard a mighty splash as the husband leaped far out into the stream; she heard his deep breath as he struggled with the billows; she felt the jar when he reached the skiff. Then she thought she hears him say:

"What in thunder does this mean! Didn't I tell you to keep out of this blamed old boat?"

"Sir—sir—" she interrupted as the boat reached the land and she felt it was time to assert her authority.

"Don't be sirring me!" shouted Clarence as he whirled her out of the skiff and gave her a shake and stood her on her feet hard.

"Now, then come along for the house, and run every step of the way."

"You—you are Clarence?" she halted to ask.

"Yes, by thunder, and your husband, too, and don't you stop to say another word!"

Two days later, as Uncle Zeb sat on his splint-bottomed chair in the veranda, Aunt Mary came out to say:

"Pa, do you hear Susie singin' upstairs?"

"Guess I do. Singin' 'cause she didn't go over the dam, eh?"

"No, sir. Singin' 'cause she's found her boss! It always makes us happy."

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